

# La. House, Senate advance each other's redistricting plans

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Plans redrawing the Louisiana Legislature's 144 election districts gained final legislative passage Monday.

The new maps give the fast-growing Baton Rouge area increased representation, and thus, more legislative political clout in the next decade.

The Louisiana House voted 71-28 for the Senate's plan realigning its 39 senatorial districts.

Moments later the Louisiana Senate voted 30-9 to go along with the House plan for its 105 state representative districts.

Approval came amid warnings from black lawmakers that the plans did not meet requirement of the federal Voting Rights Act.

The Baton Rouge area gains a new state Senate seat and three state House seats, one a newly created majority black district,

because of major population growth since the 2000 U.S. census.

Losing seats is the New Orleans area, which suffered major population losses in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Each plan creates new majority black districts. The Senate's majority black districts go from 10 to 11 and the House districts from 27 to 29.

Election district lines must be redrawn every decade to account for population changes so that they are somewhat equal in population. The House population ideal is 43,174 and the Senate's 116,240.

The measures, Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 1, now go to Gov. Bobby Jindal's desk for signing into law. After that, the legislative remap plans go to the U.S. Department of Justice for approval.

Louisiana is a Voting Rights

Act state, which means any election law changes must be approved by the Department of Justice because of the state's history of racial discrimination in voting procedures and practices.

Legislative candidates will run from the new districts in this fall's elections.

The Legislature had postponed action on the legislative remap plans on Thursday after House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, said House staffers found some technical problems with Senate district line drawing.

On Monday, Tucker said the House and Senate had agreed to disagree on the issue.

Tucker and Senate President Joel Chaisson II, D-Destrehan, each asked their colleagues to approve the other chamber's plan without alteration, which is what traditionally happens.

As the House approved, Chais-

son's Senate Bill 1, it rejected warnings that the plan did not follow federal election laws because it split up parishes and political subdivisions to protect incumbents.

During hearings on the measure, Chaisson had said a new majority black Senate district in north Louisiana had been drawn to protect two incumbent senators.

"At the end of the day, this is the Senate's plan, where the Senate has drawn its lines. We ask that they honor our lines. We should honor theirs," Tucker told the House.

"While it has its short-comings, it achieves what the Senate set out to do. It creates a new minority district. It protects community. It protects incumbents. It works in their opinion to the betterment of the people of this state," Tucker said.

Several lawmakers com-

plained that their communities had been carved up into several senatorial districts.

State Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, said the town of Bas-trop would be in two Senate districts.

State Rep. Hollis Downs, R-Ruston, complained that "the voice of the citizens" of Lincoln Parish was being silenced. The parish had been in one Senate district but the remap "splits the parish three different ways," he said.

Others complained of similar splits in the Houma-Thibodaux area and in Rapides Parish.

State Rep. Charmaine Stiaes, D-New Orleans, said SB1 disregards federal election law, which encourages parishes and political subdivisions to be kept whole, "for the sole purpose of protecting incumbents."

Senate proceedings came to a near halt to make sure the House

approved new state Senate districts without any changes.

The Senate then quickly approved the new House boundaries, also without modifications.

"I think we need to pass the (House) plan as is in light of what they did to our plan," Chaisson told the House.

State Sen. Lydia Jackson, D-Shreveport, questioned why the new House map failed to include a 30th minority seat, which was debated earlier.

The House rejected a 30th seat in the Shreveport area on several occasions.

Others said the House map failed to give minority residents the voting strength they are entitled to. State Sen. Karen Peterson, D-New Orleans, said the proposal fails to comply with the U. S. Voting Rights Act.

"There are some serious flaws," Peterson said.